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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their April 4-7 news coverage on vice president-elect Vincent Siew's planned meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Boao Forum on Hainan Island (China) from April 11-13; on president-elect Ma Ying-jeou's possible visit to the United States, and on Ma's new cross-Straits policies. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed Ma's requested U.S. trip and Siew's China trip and possible developments in Washington-Beijing-Taipei relations. Editorials in the pro-unification "United Daily News" and pro-unification, English-language "China Post" both hailed Siew's upcoming visit with Chinese President Hu Jintao, calling it a "win-win" situation for both sides of the Taiwan Strait. A separate "United Daily News" op-ed called the upcoming meeting between Siew and Hu a gamble by Ma against Washington and Beijing. An analysis in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" said a window of opportunity has opened for both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resume talks. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by a former American official, commented on U.S.-Taiwan relations and said unhappiness with President Chen Shui-bian "has served to disguise disagreement among senior U.S. policymakers and a general hardening in views about Taiwan." A separate "Taipei Times" op-ed, on the other hand, said Ma's U.S. trip has sparked controversy. End summary.

A) "[Ma Ying-jeou's] U.S. Trip and [Vincent Siew's] China Trip Are the Same Issue"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] editorialized (4/7):

"Ma Ying-jeou has yet to assume the presidency, but he cannot wait to promote his foreign policy. Vincent Siew's trip to China and Ma's trip to the United States are [moves] in the same chess game, so there is no need to view them separately. Ma's camp has long been aware that the Ma-Siew ticket would be elected, so they have started arranging the pair's visits overseas on the quiet; [the arrangement was that] Ma would visit the United States, and Siew would go to China. The best scenario [for such an arrangement] would be that both Washington and Beijing agree to Ma's and Siew's visits, which would be the biggest gift for their inauguration. The worst scenario, however, would be that neither Washington nor Beijing agrees. [Should that happen,] Ma's camp has nothing to lose; they have at least extended their goodwill gesture to the two major countries which have the power to dominate Taiwan's future.

"A scenario somewhere in between is more complicated. If Washington agrees [to Ma's trip] while Beijing says no [to Siew's visit], it would at least not be too difficult for Ma's camp to justify itself to their supporters. The United States is, in any case, Taiwan's long-term protector; if Washington accepts Ma's [visit], it will reinforce his mandate, a situation that would be a bonus for Ma. But should Beijing say yes [to Siew's visit] while Washington turns

down Ma's request, there will be two major points of concern for Ma's camp: Namely, Ma will feel worried that there will be rumors saying he is going to sell out Taiwan; also, Washington's suspicion that he is tilting toward China will make him uneasy.

"The fact that Ma suddenly expressed in public his interest in visiting the United States before his inauguration was akin to telling the Taiwan people that he loves Taiwan and attaches great importance to the United States. His additional purpose was to help purify Siew's China trip in advance and to lay bare his heart to Washington, which will in return feel that it owes him a favor in public. Washington has used every excuse to procrastinate on giving a clear answer regarding Ma's visit to the United States. China, on the other hand, quickly and joyfully accepted Siew's visit. It is obvious that Beijing feels urgency to draw close to Ma's camp. ... "But there will be many variables regarding the interaction among the three sides in the future. Sandwiched between two major countries, Ma's camp can only take one step at a time and react to whatever happens next. ..."

B) "Hu [Jintao] and [Vincent] Siew to Meet at the Boao Forum: Realizing the Win-Win Situation amid Transformation!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (4/7):

"... We truly hope that Hu Jintao and Vincent Siew can formally meet each other at this year's Boao Forum, unveiling a 'Hu-Siew meeting/new era' for both sides of the Taiwan Strait or even establishing a foundation for a '2008 cross-Strait consensus.' In fact, both Hu and Siew are the best choice to unveil this new era. ... We are willing to believe that Hu and Siew, as judged from their personalities, are capable of being the leading exponents of 'transformation' for both sides of the Taiwan Strait and the people who can be trusted to push for a 'win-win' situation across the Strait. As a result, Taipei and Beijing are perhaps still taking a

guarded attitude toward the Boao Forum to test the waters, but we expect both sides not to waste this wonderful pivotal opportunity and to strive to create something as lofty as the '2008 cross-Strait Boao consensus.' ..."

C) "Hu-Siew Meeting -- Ma [Ying-jeou's] Gambling with the United States and China"

Shih Chien University Dean of Student Affairs Lai Yueh-tchienn opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (4/7):

"... Since Vincent Siew must first obtain Ma Ying-jeou's approval for his trip to Hainan Island, Siew is practically a proxy for Ma. The writer personally believes that [Siew's trip] can be viewed as a counterpoint to [Washington's] reaction to Ma's request for a U.S. trip; namely, it is a gamble by Ma between Washington and Beijing. After his election, Ma hopes to improve [Taiwan's] relations with the U.S. government so as to increase his bargaining chips during [Taiwan's future] talks with Beijing. Ma thus chose the strategy of extending a goodwill gesture to Washington by handing over his strategic initiative and letting Washington decide whether to accept Ma's request of a U.S. trip. Ma was consequently stuck in a dilemma of passivity. In the face of Washington's inactive attitude, Ma changed his direction by going from Taipei through Beijing to Washington. Ma probably believes that, once he breaks through Washington, he will be able to travel to Tokyo, Paris, London, Berlin and Brussels. ..."

"Opening a door to Ma and Siew will possibly create an opportunity and climate for [Beijing] to hold its Olympics smoothly. Such benefits are enormous. Even though such a decision will likely change the U.S. government's original attitude toward Ma, still, when comparing the two, a smooth Olympics outweighs Ma's U.S. trip after all. Similarly, Washington may also open its doors to Ma because Beijing allows Siew to visit. The move might help Washington get Ma's promise of the U.S. arms package in return, and such benefits will be tremendous for the U.S. administration which will step down at the end of this year. Consequently, should Ma and

Siew be able to visit the United States and China, respectively, the benefits for them will be huge as well. ..."

D) "The Window of Opportunity Has Silently Opened for Both Sides of the Taiwan Strait to Resume Talks"

Journalist Wang Ming-yi noted in an analysis in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (4/6):

"... Hu Jintao's specific policy announcement [on the 1992 consensus] was, without a doubt, a declaration to the world that both sides of the Taiwan Strait are about to walk out of the political stalemate. Now Beijing's warm welcome extended to Vincent Siew to attend the Boao Forum has again proved that Hu's policy thinking has completely gone beyond the traditional framework of China's Taiwan policy, and he has instead adopted a flexible and pragmatic policy. Under pressure from severe challenges coming both internally and externally, Hu continued to adopt a pragmatic approach, resolve the deadlock of the '1992 consensus', and create a new chapter of dialogue with the new Ma-Siew administration. This is, without a doubt, a 'window of opportunity' for both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resume talks. It is also advantageous timing for both sides to put aside their disputes, pragmatically re-open talks on various issues, and construct a new framework for cross-Strait relations."

E) "Boao Forum Paves the Way for a Cross-Strait Common Market"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (4/7):

"The best news in Taiwan after Ma Ying-jeou's landslide victory in the presidential election on March 22 is his running mate Vincent Siew's scheduled visit to Boao on Hainan Island to meet with Chinese president Hu Jintao this coming weekend. ... Perhaps it might have been offered as a consolation prize after Beijing successfully opposed Ma Ying-jeou's loudly announced plan to visit the United States as president-elect. At any rate, Siew should take the opportunity to help Hu Jintao better understand the man who will be sworn in as president on May 20. ... We do wish Vincent Siew every success at Boao. His success will pave the way for the long-awaited detente between Taiwan and China."

F) "Change is Hard in Taiwan and US"

Kurt Campbell, the chief executive officer and co-founder of Center for a New American Security, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (4/4):

" Ma has made it amply clear that he wants a fundamentally better formal relationship between Taiwan and China. Ma has articulated a perfectly reasonable set of guidelines for how to conduct economic and political relations with Beijing that should, at least in theory, be far more welcome to China. However, in recent years, China's cross-strait policy has been notable for its lack of flexibility. It is not clear whether China's secretive leaders are prepared to take a variation on 'yes' for an answer, particularly after the most recent upheavals in Tibet. Chinese leaders and diplomats have not demonstrated any facility for flexibility when it comes to Taiwan lately and there are indications that at least some of the key actors in the Politburo would prefer to keep the pressure on Taiwan."

"Ma and his associates probably anticipate at least some of the diplomatic stubbornness that likely lies ahead in relations with China, but he will probably be surprised by an unfortunate continuity in US policy toward Taiwan. As is well known, Taiwan-US relations have hit a low point in recent years and there are broad hopes in some quarters that under Ma's administration, Taiwan-US relations will revive - perhaps even substantially. However, too much is made of the role that Chen played in the recent downturn in relations. The truth is, despite the fact that most of the blame for current troubles was placed on Chen and his advisers, the US shares the responsibility. Like on most other issues of real consequence in foreign policy, the Bush team has been far from united on the issue of Taiwan. Unhappiness with Chen has served to disguise disagreement among senior US policymakers and a general hardening of

views about Taiwan.

"A desire to avoid problems with China given US preoccupations and difficulties elsewhere is palpable in US thinking. Privately, the incoming policymakers in Taiwan are hoping for a better relationship with Washington, including higher level contacts, public acknowledgement and appreciation for Taiwan's contributions, and even overt military planning in the case of contingencies. However, it's far from clear whether the Bush administration wants much beyond Taiwanese quiescence in its actions and utterances. It is possible that despite Taiwanese hopes for better relations with Washington and Beijing there are powerful forces that favor a certain degree of continuity in these key relationships. This turn of events is likely to be deeply discouraging for Taiwan. The hope, however, is that leaders in Beijing and Washington will appreciate the significance of the outcome of the Taiwanese presidential election and will take full advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead."

G) "Ma's Dream of Visiting US Sparks Controversy"

Liu Shih-chung, vice chairman of the Research and Planning Committee at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (4/6):

"... In his telephone conversation with Bush, Chinese President Hu Jintao reportedly said Beijing could accept the so-called '1992 consensus,' under which each side of the Taiwan Strait should be allowed to have its own definition of 'one China.' But does Hu's spurious gesture of 'goodwill' translate into Chinese approval for Taiwan's newly elected president to visit Washington at such a sensitive juncture? ...

"Ma's diplomatic maneuvering reflects his double standard concerning the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration's foreign policy. During his election campaign, Ma accused the DPP of being confrontational and a trouble-maker on the international front, and especially concerning relations with the US and China. ... If that is true, wouldn't Ma's attempt to visit Japan and the US risk raising Beijing's hackles too? How does he intend to make peace with Beijing and win more international space for Taiwan if Chinese authorities find his actions as provoking as Chen's?"

YOUNG